

Caregiver Connection

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A monthly publication for Washington state foster and adoptive families and relative caregivers.
WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES, CHILDREN'S ADMINISTRATION



Saluting another kind of service

Military families are all about serving their country, giving back in many ways and in many difficult situations.

Now they are finding another way to serve, becoming licensed as foster parents through a partnership between Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM), the state Children's Administration (CA) and Foster Care Resource Network (FCRN), which holds a state contract for foster parent recruitment and retention in Region 3 North (formerly Region 5).

For some time, both CA and FCRN have wanted to establish a program to license military foster homes for military families in what Traci Eveland of FCRN describes as "a city within a city." Over the last several months, the right people in the right place at the right time saw the need and worked together to bring a pilot project to fruition.

Two families have been licensed so far; the goal is 17.

Amanda Slagle, 30 and her husband David 37, were the first to be licensed. Amanda said they

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KINSHIP CARE IN WASHINGTON STATE WEBSITE www.dshs.wa.gov/kinshipcare

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have two biological children, but she felt a yearning to do more with kids. They have had a two-year old since May who has done a “complete turn-around” in his behavior since being with them, Amanda said.

“It’s my way of giving back to the community and to have ‘the extra kid fix,’” she said. Being part of the military culture, she and her husband understand the particular stresses and strains of military life.

“Who better to take care of military children than those in the military,” she said.

That attitude fits exactly with the goal of the CA to keep children removed from their biological homes in their communities and schools whenever possible. In 2009, the last year data is available, 68 children were removed from their homes at JBLM.

“The less trauma when a child is removed from their home the better,” said Elizabeth Griffin Hall of FCRN, echoing Amanda’s sentiments. “It’s a very exciting project.”

Sandy Vest with JBLM was a social worker in Kansas and has been integral to making the program work. Dr. Tamara Grigsby, a child abuse pediatrician on the base saw the need for foster homes and pushed the idea forward. A work group held many meetings to discuss the issue and plan for its implementation.

“As far as we know, this is a first,” on a military base, Sandy said. “A lot of people didn’t even know they could become foster parents.” She said the housing unit on the base also helped with the program by prioritizing foster families for larger houses. Amanda and Dave Slagle have a four-bedroom home on the base because they are providing foster care. And having a bigger house opens the door to siblings being placed together, another key goal of the child welfare system.

Dr. Grigsby said she saw kids placed in homes outside the base who were disconnected from base services. She thought one solution was to license more on-base foster homes. And the garrison commander on base was a strong supporter to help get the project started, she said.

“It’s baby steps, but it’s incredible,” she said. “These are kids (where) you can really make a difference.”

Area Administrator Linda Kalinowki of the Children’s Administration Division of Licensed Resources, said the support on base is important. “These are families stepping forward to work with their colleagues.”

Amanda Slagle said the support she receives is important. Family support from the military is already very strong because of the stresses on military families; that support helps as she works as a foster parent. It also helps that her husband is from the area and has family nearby.

“I’m very happy with our decision,” she said of becoming a foster parent. “We’ll do it as long as we’re here.”

REMINDER:
Have you asked
recently about the next
court date for you and
your foster child?



Random visits

House Bill 1697 passed the Legislature this year requiring Children’s Administration to make random, unannounced visits to 10 percent of licensed caregivers every year.

The unannounced visit will take the place of the scheduled monthly health and safety visit already required. The homes to receive the visit will be chosen at random through the state’s FamLink computer system. If no one is home during the unannounced visit, a regular announced visit will be set up. No caregiver will receive an unannounced visit through the random selection process for two consecutive years.

The bill was not requested by Children’s Administration, but was supported by foster youth and foster care alumni, some of whom were affiliated with the Mockingbird Society.

Amanda Bevington said she supported the bill because she had a bad experience in foster care. She believes the bill would help hold the foster care system more accountable for the kids in its care.

“I just really spoke because I want to improve the foster care system,” she said. In an article she wrote for the Mockingbird Times, she added, “There are so many precious lives in the foster care system, and given my own experience, I know we need to do all we can to make sure each child and youth are getting the proper care. Safety nets like the unannounced visit policy help educate and support, not only the youth, but the foster parents too. And, if children and youth are safe at home, they are going to do better when they age out of care and become adults.”

Children’s Administration previously had the authority to do unannounced visits. This made it mandatory and formalized the process, including ensuring visits would be randomly selected.

Tackling tricky school assignments

(Shared from *Adoptive Families Newsletter*)

Six projects account for most of the tricky assignments adopted kids face at school. Understanding the learning goals and the specific challenges each one poses will help parents and children alike find the best solutions.

- **THE BABY PICTURE** – helps children get to know each other, but may be difficult for children adopted at an older age, who don't have a baby picture.

Alternatives for teachers: Have children bring in pictures from when they were “younger,” or draw pictures of themselves as babies.

Approaches for parents: Let your child know that you wish you had photos, too, and say that you're sure she was a beautiful baby. Encourage her to draw a picture of herself.

- **THE FAMILY TREE** – helps illustrate family relationships. Format may not accommodate both birth and adoptive families, or non-traditional families.

Alternatives for teachers: Offer formats showing roots as well as branches; instead of a tree, have students create a family forest or a neighborhood of family houses.

Approaches for parents: Allow your child to choose which family or families to portray, or encourage him to design his own format.

- **THE STAR OF THE WEEK** – children learn more about each other while promoting leadership. When placed in the spotlight children may not be comfortable handling adoption questions.

Alternatives for teachers: Instead of focusing on the child's past, let the Star student talk about pets, current hobbies, and other elements of her life.

Approaches for parents: Role-play responses to questions in advance. Ask your child about accompanying her to school to give an adoption presentation.

- **HERITAGE EXPLORATION** – children learn about different cultures. Children are asked to write about their birth heritage, but may prefer to write about the cultural background of their adoptive family or vice versa.

Alternatives for teachers: Let students report on a country or culture of interest rather than one related to their family.

Approaches for parents: Provide any available resources about adoptive and birth family culture. Accompany child to class, if appropriate, to help share information.

- **HISTORICAL TIMELINE** – children learn to chart events on a time line from birth to the present. Children may not know early information, or may be uncomfortable in disclosing early adoption information.

Alternatives for teachers: Do not specify timeline must begin at birth. Allow for “past, present, and future.” Let children create timeline for historical event or fictional character.

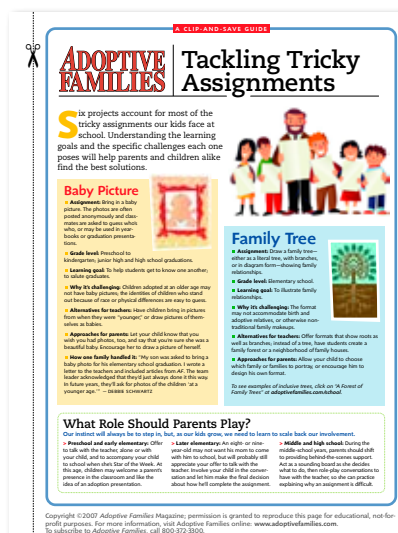
Approaches for parents: Help your child decide how to define “significant events,” and what she wants to keep private. Encourage general labels, such as “When I Was One,” rather than specific dates.

- **CHARTING GENERIC TRAITS** – children learn how genetic characteristics are passed through the generations. Child may not have much information, or this may raise unwanted questions.

Alternatives for teachers: Study insect or plant genetics. Use historical examples, such as the prevalence of inherited diseases in the royal families of Europe.

Approaches for parents: Help your child identify friends or a biologically related family group, such as grandparents or cousins, on which to base a genetic chart.

To access the full guide go to:
www.adoptivefamilies.com/pdf/Assignments.pdf



Back to school tips

Summer is nearly over, and for frazzled parents of rambunctious school-age kids, September looks like an oasis of calm. Planning and preparing now can ease the turbulence of back to school. Here are some things you can do to get ready for the transition.

Medical – Check the child's records for an immunization form, date of last physical and other info your school district requires. If the child is new to your home, consider scheduling a “getting to know you” appointment with your doctor.

Paperwork – Make sure you have the name, address and phone number of the last school the child attended, plus other required information. Your neighborhood school staff is in the office this month and eager to guide you.

Education plans – Ask your child's case-worker what, if any, education plans or services the child had before. Check that the school registrar and counselor have what they need for your child.

Lifesaver card – Write up a small card with essential info the child may not yet have memorized, like your address and phone number, his bus number, the name and number of a helpful relative or neighbor in case of emergency. Make a couple of copies and give him one for his backpack and one for his pocket. Laminate the cards if he has memory or attention problems and might need to carry them around a while.

Take a tour – If the child is bussing, biking or walking to school, practice the route until he is comfortable. Talk about and practice safety rules. Tour the school. Visit the classroom. Play on the playground. Practice opening his locker.

Meet 'n' greet – Attend open houses and orientations. Talk with the teacher and school secretaries so they know the child and have a general idea of his strengths and challenges. If he's willing, have the child do the talking.

Prepare his story – Help the child come up with a way to describe his living situation that he is comfortable with. He needs to know that his story is private and he has a right to keep unpleasant details from other children.



Important numbers to know when you take care of children in out-of-home care

Foster Parent and Caregiver Crisis and Support Line: 1-800-301-1868

ON-GOING AND CRISIS SUPPORTS FOR FOSTER PARENTS

Under contracts with the state, three private agencies are working to build supports for you within the foster care community. Supports include hubs, support groups, and matching new foster parents with veteran foster parents. To get connected:

- If you live in Eastern Washington, the Olympic Peninsula down through Pacific County or from Thurston County to Clark County, call 1-888-794-1794.
- If you live in King County, call the Fostering Together liaison, 206-850-4420. If you live in Region 2 North (counties north of King County), call the Fostering Together liaison 360-220-3785.
- If you live in Pierce or Kitsap counties, call 253-473-9252.
- If you live in King County, the Friends of Youth CARE program provides short-term counseling, education and support to help you care for your most difficult children. 1-888-263-3457 or 206-915-0459.

Family Help Line: 1-800-932-HOPE or www.parenttrust.org. The Family Help Line is a free, statewide training and referral line for the families of Washington state. Last year, the Family Help Line received more than 5,000 calls and requests for information. Calls can last up to 90 minutes and parents can call as often as needed.

The **Fostering Well-Being Care Coordination Unit** can help answer health-related questions or help you work on health related issues with children/youth in your care. Contact information: 1-800-422-3263 or 360-725-2626 (8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.) or e-mail: dhsfwbccu@dshs.wa.gov. Please take care not to include any identifying information about a child unless sent through a secure e-mail account.

Support for foster parents under investigation for allegations of abuse or neglect: Foster Parent Investigation Retention Support Team (FIRST) 253-219-6782. Monday through Saturday, 8:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m., or leave a message and receive a return call within 24 hours.

Foster Parent and Caregiver Crisis and Support Line: 1-800-301-1868

Mental Health Crisis Line Information: The crisis line telephone number for your county or region is available on the DSHS Mental Health Division website at www.dshs.wa.gov/mentalhealth/crisis.shtml

GENERAL FOSTER PARENT INFORMATION FOR THE STATE OF WASHINGTON

FPAWS: Foster Parent Association of Washington State is an all volunteer non-profit association. It is led by experienced caregivers who provide support and helpful services to all caregivers (foster, adoptive, and kinship) in Washington State. In addition, FPAWS advocates for caregivers with Washington's legislative officials, all levels of Children's Administration staff and other community service providers to enhance the child welfare system. Contact FPAWS at www.fpaws.org or 1-800-391-CARE (2273).

Kitsap and Pierce County information about becoming a foster parent or to receive foster parent support: Foster Care Resource Network, 253-473-9252. Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. or leave a message and receive a return call by the next business day.

RESOURCE INFORMATION AVAILABLE STATEWIDE

Get connected to information on resources in your area by calling 211 – a toll free number.

Girl Scouts of Western Washington: Fostering a Future: MeccaYS@girlscouts.org

Women, Infant and Children Program (WIC): www.parenthelp123.org/resources/food-resources

Children's Administration Foster Parent Website: www.dshs.wa.gov/ca/fosterparents/

Children's Administration Foster Parent Training Website – Trainings are open to all licensed foster parents, licensed relative caregivers and unlicensed caregivers. For information about foster parent and caregiver training, check out: www.dshs.wa.gov/ca/fosterparents/training.asp

CHILDREN'S ADMINISTRATION FOSTER CARE LISTSERV

Join the 2,900 people who have subscribed to the List Serve <http://listserv.wa.gov/cgi-bin/wa?SUBED1=fosterparents&&A=1> for updated information on resources for the work you do in caring for children.

Family Planning Services are designed to help avoid unwanted or mistimed pregnancy and are available through your local Community Service Office (CSO). Each CSO has a full time Family Planning Nurse to help provide services to Medicaid eligible clients. There is also a Family Planning hotline number 1-800-770-4334.

Keeping brothers and sisters connected

Siblings placed apart must have at least two visits a month. Foster parents and relative caregivers are instrumental partners in bringing siblings together for visits and in promoting sibling relationships. When you can assist with visits, it supports a more relaxed environment for the children in your care. Caregivers who facilitate sibling visits are eligible for an activity reimbursement for each child.

MILEAGE AND ACTIVITIES:

CA will reimburse caregivers (up to twice per month) up to \$7.50 (per child per visit) for a child's activities that take place during visits with siblings.

Examples of things we can pay for:

- Admission fees to sports activities, museums, movies, parks, etc.
- Snacks or meals
- Classes
 - Mileage for one round trip per visit will be reimbursed

Reimbursement is only for:

- The child's activities. CA can't reimburse a caregiver for their costs or the costs for other children in the home.
- Siblings placed apart, not siblings placed together.

How to get reimbursed:

1. Keep your receipts for activities you paid for.
2. Complete the CA Mileage Reimbursement form (found on our electronic forms page www.dshs.wa.gov/forms/eforms.shtml. Scroll down to find form # 07-079). Use code "1" for mileage and "8" for activity fees. Attach original receipts to your mileage form and send it to the child's social worker. Remember to keep a copy of your form.

All requests for reimbursement must be submitted within 90 days.

